

**‘CORD’ ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY  
IN THE VISTULA AND DNEIPEP  
INTERFLUVIAL REGION:  
5TH – 4TH MILL. BC**

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**BALTIC-PONTIC STUDIES**

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## CONTENTS

EDITORS' FOREWORD .....	5
PART 1. 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH ..	7
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORDED' ORNAMENTATION ON CLAY VESSELS IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER RIVER REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. RESEARCH PROJECT AIMS .....	7
Aleksander Koško, Andrzej Sikorski, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORDED' AND 'CORD-LIKE' ORNAMENTATION IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION IN THE 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. INTRODUCTION TO INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH .....	13
Andrzej Sikorski, MORE THAN JUST 'CORDS' ON NEOLITHIC CERAMIC WARE: AN OUTLINE OF MICROSCOPIC IDENTIFICATION FOR 'CORDED ORNAMENTATION'. SOME THOUGHTS ON RESEARCH METHODS .....	49
PART 2. 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. GENERAL INTERPRETATIONS...	57
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORDED' ORNAMENTATION ON CLAY VESSELS IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. AN OUTLINE OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS .....	57
Andrzej Piotr Kowalski, NEOLITHIC POTTERY ORNAMENTED WITH 'CORD' IMPRESSIONS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL – SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION ....	64
PART 3. 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. REGIONAL MACROSCOPIC AND MICROSCOPIC RESEARCH .....	75
Nadezhda S. Kotova, THE FIRST 'CORDED' CERAMICS ORNAMENTATION OF ENEOLITHIC STEPPE AND NEOLITHIC FOREST-STEPPE CULTURES .....	75
Natalia B. Burdo, Mykhailo Y. Videiko, 'CORD'-ORNAMENTED POTTERY OF THE TRYPILLIA CULTURE. A MACRO ANALYSIS .....	110
Natalia B. Burdo, Nadezhda S. Kotova, Mykhailo Y. Videiko, TECHNOLOGICAL STUDY OF 'CORD' IMPRESSIONS ON MIDDLE AND LATE ENEOLITHIC POTTERY IN UKRAINE .....	122

Sławomir Kadrow, Piotr Olejarczyk, 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE POTTERY AT TOMINY, SITE 12 .....	135
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORD' AND 'CORD-LIKE' ORNAMENTS ON THE POTTERY OF FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE SOCIETIES ON THE POLISH LOWLANDS IN THE 4TH MILLENNIUM BC ....	146
CONCLUSION .....	153
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNEIPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS .....	153
References .....	156
List of Authors .....	171

## Editor's Foreword

The issues outlined in the above volume of *Baltic-Pontic Studies* (BPS) presented here, can be said to generate several important and complex questions among which, one relating to the topogenesis of 'corded' ornamentation on the bio-cultural borderlands of east and west Europe, gave birth to an innovative research project. In this respect, specialist researchers of the Pontic-Baltic Eneolithic (from Middle and Late Neolithic contexts) chose 45 vessels (mostly fragments) originating from the Dnieper-Southern Bug drainage area and Vistula, dated to the 5th - 4th/3rd mill. BC for the purposes of microscopic analyses conducted with the aim of identifying 'corded' patterns of ornamentation. These laboratory tests were led by an archaeologist specialising in microscopic analysis to identify interdisciplinary, pre-historic and archaic techniques in the textile crafts.

The implications of the above tests would seem to warrant a manifold approach to possible conclusions on the basis of specialist (microscopic) criteria of differentiated - previously identified as macroscopic - in general terms as 'corded' motifs of ceramic ware ornamentation (part 1). This also concerns an outline of investigation drawn from hermeneutics, prompted by various contexts such as historical and cultural assessment of bio-cultural communities and related findings as well as attempts to generate a coherent framework of linguistic and cultural research for 'corded ornamentation on ceramic ware' (part 2).

In discussing further the 'main issues' presented in this publication of BPS 15 in respect to the hand manufacture of ceramic ware of the Vistula and Dnieper interfluvial region and its peoples, a modus operandi of investigation in the context of region has been proposed whereby researchers of this particular project have been given a free hand, as it were, in respect to the degree and forms of application in microscopic analyses and their findings. A series of commentaries has therefore arisen, from various points of view in so far as reflections on research conducted - possible future strategies for vital questions in this matter that are yet to be answered (part 3).

It is assumed therefore that this volume has in some measure initiated a process of the highest consequence, one introducing a new level of off-site investigation into the genesis of corded ornamentation development, which deserves to be supported in addition through a personal engagement in this research field.

## Editorial comment

1. All dates in the B-PS are calibrated [BC; see: Radiocarbon vol. 28, 1986, and the next volumes]. Deviations from this rule will be point out in notes [bc].
2. The names of the archaeological cultures and sites are standarized to the English literature on the subject (e.g. M. Gimbutas, J.P. Mallory). In the case of a new term, the author's original name has been retained.
3. The spelling of names of localities having the rank of administrative centres follows official, state, English language cartographic publications (e.g. *Ukraine, scale 1 : 2 000 000*, Kiev: Mapa LTD, edition of 1996; *Rèspublika BELARUS', REVIEW-TOPOGRAPHIC MAP*, scale 1:1 000 000, Minsk: *BYELORUSSIAN CARTOGRAPHIC AN GEODETIC ENTERPISE*, edition 1993).

**Andrzej Piotr Kowalski**

## NEOLITHIC POTTERY ORNAMENTED WITH ‘CORD’ IMPRESSIONS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL – SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cord-ornamented vessels emerged with the oldest known pottery attributable to the Jomon (‘cord’) Japanese culture dated back to as early as 13600 BC [Zhushchikhovskaya 2007] and with proto-/sub- Neolithic cultures spreading across a vast territory of the Asian part of contemporary Russia [Kuzmin 2002]. In east and central Europe that type of decoration became widespread in the subsequent Neolithic periods [see Koško, Sikorski, Szmyt... – part 2, in this volume, for information about the identification of cord ornamentation techniques as per specific taxonomic units]. The above phenomenon has been viewed singular enough to encourage numerous hypotheses related to: a) ethnogenesis of prehistoric peoples in Europe (see old concepts linking the development of the Corded Ware Culture (CWC) to the expansion of the Indo-Europeans, b) symbolic functions and provenance of the corded pottery, c) cultural concepts and social structure of communities using that type of vessels. Furthermore, the anthropological interpretation of the discussed phenomenon focuses on two aspects. The first, more general in nature, is centred around the relation ‘object / vessel’ – ‘ornament on the vessel’ and thus pertains to the cult/worship status of objects in the culture dominated by realistic-magical experience and the genealogy of the analysed decoration technique. The second aspect focuses on a hypothetical set of concepts reconstructed, primarily, against the background of the “Indo-European model of culture” representing a presupposed storage of signs.

## 2. VESSEL AS AN OBJECT IN THE EXPERIENCE OF PRIMITIVE COMMUNITIES

The cultural existence of objects in the sphere of magical experience is unique in its nature. This is embodied mainly in the treatment of ornamented objects that most likely were not carrying meanings subject to a purely passive perception, and thus disengaged a reading of their meanings. Such an interpretation arises from the analyses of folk customs and religious studies – quoting van der Leeuw: ‘For archaic man, an object is the means of power; an object can make something happen, lives its own life, which is reflected in quite an empirical form’ [van der Leeuw 1997:31; Hultkrantz 1983]. That interpretation is also supported by cognitive grammar patterns underlying primitive languages, in particular, traces of ergative constructions identified in some of the Indo-European languages (for example, nondistinguishable animated and nonanimated or female and male categories, etc.) [Montaut 1997; Alexiadou 2001:185].

Within the cultural framework of the Neolithic communities, an organic receptacle and a ceramic vessel may have been viewed as a characteristic ‘being of things’. Therefore, from the realistic-magical point of view, bulging leather skins, shrinking or breaking basket weave patterns and also pots full of boiling dishes were probably interpreted *dynamically* that is as centres of a quasisubjective latent force embedded in objects [for more information about the notion of *magic dynamism* in the context of religious studies based on the evidence of Roman religion, see Wagenvoort 1947]. Hence, in line with the cultural classification derived from this type of perception, a vessel is also anthropomorphised in an unprecedented manner. Consequently, many pottery vessels were subject to treatments similar to well known traditional medicine practices where for example in the Neolithic, pots were impregnated with wood tar, which has been used as a component of numerous pharmaceutical preparations until contemporary times [Langer, Koško 1999]. Thus, it cannot be precluded that the walls of a vessel (both organic and clay) were identified as tantamount to a human body and skin. In conclusion, the *dynamic* perception consists in seeing ‘an internal form of being or existence’ that cannot be assimilated through the senses only and which represents an imperceptible feature of objects referred to as a so called still life. Yet, it is important to realize the scope of the ‘object’ and ‘man’ notions in the primitive culture which actually classifies the two types of existences as inseparable.

Therefore, a vessel can be used as a sign incorporating (not only in a substitutive and symbolic way but by all means realistically) the conceptual framework and connotations of concepts related to human beings. Actually, ethnological and archaeological data confirm the inner and mutual dependencies underlying the above phenomenon. For example, anthropomorphic vessels, in the form of canopic jars, reflect the *human* nature of pottery typical of mythical thinking. On

the other hand, ethnological data provide significant indications of human beings 'being transformed' into vessels/objects. For example, some Devanga clans from Madras bore the following names: 'coin', 'dam', 'house', 'scissors', 'boat', 'rob', 'old wooden plough' and, what is of special interest in the context of this study, 'cord/string to hang up pots'. In addition, amongst the Mid-Indian Bhil peoples there was 'broken pot' clan whose members were obliged to collect pieces of broken pottery (select types of vessels) and bury them in a ceremonial manner [Lévi-Strauss 2001:160-161]. The evidence supplied above enables a hypothetic evaluation of the role performed by vessels within a social system which distributed signs giving value, for example, to the sense of group identity shared by users of those signs. In addition, the symbolism of textile and cord patterns impressed into the Neolithic pottery as decorative elements may also testify to the great sociopragmatic significance of used signs.

### 3. TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CORD-ORNAMENT ORIGIN

The typical middle-European Neolithic method of shaping and decorating pottery is presumed to originate from the tradition of hand manufactured organic receptacles. That view was advocated by A. Götze [Götze 1891] and M. Hoernes [Hoernes 1898:37ff]. The issue of origin was explored, in particular, by G. Wilke [Wilke 1906; 1910] who supported the concept of technological inspirations driving the spread of the ribbon and cord ornamentation on the Neolithic pottery. Wilke believed that the plaited ornament stemmed from the primitive method of covering the inner walls of a basket with clay. A basket insulated this way could have easily become a prototype of a piece of pottery given that even its accidental burning unavoidably resulted in the production of a piece of an earthen shell with plaiting impressions [Wilke 1910:2-3]. The 'technological' origin issues were raised also by C. Schuchhardt who made the effort to prove formal similarities of Neolithic pottery with organic receptacles such as hollowed out gourds and baskets. He attempted to prove that the vessels found in the northern regions of Europe bore the mark of the former 'basketry style' [Schuchhardt 1909].

Nevertheless, the ribbon or textile ornamentation on pottery only to a limited extent reflects primitive techniques applied to make organic receptacles. It seems though that both pure imitation and temporary replacement of some types of objects (for example the replacement of earthenware by pots/receptacles which were woven or made from hollowed out wood) could have resulted from the split of production tasks applicable at that time. Apparently, many specialised crafts did not bear separate names, as it transpires from Indo-European data. In particular, the analyses of pottery-related terminology have long ago highlighted its unique

references to carpentry as well as to plaiting and weaving crafts. The derivative forms of the lexeme *teks-*; *tetk-* ‘make, produce, hew, plait’, for example, the Greek *tektōn* meaning, amongst other, ‘builder working with clay’, the Latin *testa* ‘pot, earthen pot’, *texō* ‘I plait, weave, make’ testify to the coexistence of various production branches [Rix 2001:638]. All that fits well into the tradition of established iso-pragmatic activities, i.e. activities performed within a specific field which had their precise equivalents in related fields subject to similar classification criteria. Those findings provided the grounds for the reconstructed terminology of non-specialised craftwork combining significant meanings related to plaiting, braiding, binding/tying and weaving with meanings typical of pottery and building [Kowalski, Witczak 2003]. Furthermore, it should be noted that the similarities between weaving and pottery were driven not only by the applied technical methods but were also sanctioned by a set of magical beliefs. This is confirmed by additional semantic references of the above mentioned lexeme *teks-* analysed in the context of the Indo-European culture, where the magic of knots related to the semantic field of *teks*, which also entailed the art of incantations and later, the art of sublime language and poetry, i.e. ‘song weaving’ [Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984:835].

Notwithstanding, the model of skills and competence reconstructed in this study, based on Indo-European data, would suggest it is worth making an attempt to interpret the rationale behind the use of cord impressions or even cords and textiles themselves, as decorative elements of Neolithic ware.

#### 4. INDO-EUROPEAN TERMINOLOGY OF TEXTILE TECHNIQUES APPLIED TO HAND MANUFACTURE RECEPTACLES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

The issues concerning hand manufacture of textiles in Neolithic Europe and related technical terminology, representing part of the reconstructed Indo-European lexicon, were raised by E.J.W. Barber [Barber 1991]. In addition, interesting comments on the use of textile techniques in hand production of receptacles were made by J. Puhvel who noted two separate archaic methods of preparing plaited objects. One method consisted of winding, twisting and tensing fibres, while the other used plaiting, interweaving and tying. The Indo-European tradition of manufacturing receptacles attached greater importance to strong twisting, winding and spinning rather than to interweaving and plaiting. That very opposition is illustrated by the Vedic *vayati* ‘plait’ as compared to *krt-* ‘wind, twist’. What is more, the Greek term *kártallos* meaning a basket, related to the Vedic *krt-* is tantamount to ‘something tightly wound, a strong durable receptacle’ [Puhvel 1977:150-151; for similar suggestions, see: Barber 1975:301]. Independently of the above analyses, similar observations were made by W.P. Lehmann

who pointed out that the Gothic name of a receptacle *snōrjon* meant ‘a receptacle – a basket made of tightly wound cords’, while the term *tainjōn* < *tainaz* ‘twist’ referred to ‘baskets woven from withies [Lehmann 1986:317]. Indeed, the Gothic *snōrjo* ‘basket, net’ is related to the archaic Germanic *snōrō-* ‘cord, string’ which can actually be combined to create the Indo-European form *sne-wer-/n-* ‘twist, wind’ [Pokorny 1959:976; Orel 2003:359, 399].

The same analogies can be identified in the case of related Indo-Iranian and Germanic terms used to denote a basket: Indo-Iranian *gradh-* ‘tie, twist, tighten’, archaic Iranian *granthi* ‘turn down the wick’, archaic Germanic *kratto* ‘basket’, archaic English *cradol* ‘basket’ < pre-Germanic *kraddō* < Indo-European *gret-* ‘basket, plaiting’ all of which emphasise the strength of a weave pattern [Pokorny 1959:386; Rix 2001:191; Cheung 2007:122].

Semantic analogies are also evident for the Hittite *GIšerhui* ‘basket’ (< het. arha-; irha ‘rope, cord, rim, something wound up’) and the related Latin term *ōra* ‘rim marked out by a cord’. That line of similarities is continued by the Indo-European *ōrhah-* ‘something wound by a rope’, ‘rim, cord’ [Puhvel 1977:152; 1984 I:283].

Additionally, the semantic features of the pre-Germanic lexeme *tau3ō* meaning ‘cord’ are also interesting. The word is often combined with the Indo-European *dewk-* ‘lead, guide’. According to Lehmann, that meaning of the word originated from the use of a cord by herding communities and can be explained in the following manner: the morpheme *dewk* refers to leading a herd of cattle by dragging them one after another as opposed to another word *ag-* ‘drive’ which means ‘driving a herd’ [Lehmann 1986:346; Seebold 1970:504; Orel 2003:403]. In that context, a cord would represent a tool characteristic of a person dragging a herd behind and could be associated with the herding power. Thus, a cord of that type would be tantamount to insignia worn by a leader of nomadic communities and could be viewed as a symbol of a person leading people and animals. That interpretation might also explain the great significance of a cord in the sacerdotal symbolism, for example, in ancient India [Eliade 1960].

## 5. SEMIOTIC COMPLEXES INSPIRED BY THE SYMBOL OF A CORD

### 5.1 CORD AS A NATURAL SYMBOL OF STRENGTH AND POWER

Linguists have identified unique significance attached to cords or yarn, viewed as strongly developed fibres with some tying potential, stemming from magical-

mythical thinking. Most of all, however, a cord symbolises and epitomises a strong, permanent and powerful element. Similar features were attributed to well prepared, tightly woven yarn and fabric. The above symbolism, though, is not based exclusively on the physical features of a cord and plaiting but on their supernatural power embodied in a magical experience. Therefore, the Greek term denoting a basket *kalathos* refers to the name of a mythical spinner *Klothō* < Indo-European *klō-dh-ō* ‘cord, yarn’ < *k’leh<sub>3</sub>dh-* ‘twist’ [Pokorny 1959:611; Puhvel 1984 I:34-35; Rix 2001:362].

To give two other examples, in the archaic Indian tradition a cord named *yajñah pavita* had the power to purify an offering [Mayrhofer 1964 III:3-4], while another cord used in the Zoroastrian rituals epitomised the apotropaic power to ward off evil – a red cord paralysed the death demon *Nasu*. In addition, *dakhma* a place used by Zoroastrians for exposure of the dead was secured in a special manner. Its clay barrel-shaped skeleton was tied around with a cord to prevent any tainting of the divine earth element [Składankowa 1963:160, 200].

From that perspective, the apotropaic ritual which consisted of tying an object around with a cord represents an important part of analyses aimed at assessing the significance of cord impressions on pottery. In realistic-magical thinking, such an impression is not just a sign of a cord but rather (as a trace of the cord’s physical contact with clay) a form of the cord’s presence along with the whole set of its attributes. Hence, a cord or plaiting impressed into a vessel surface is metonymically present in the vessel’s structure.

As a result, in the context of the discussed type of magical experience, the vessel, just like the cord itself, becomes an object of power and continuity and maybe even ensures protection against undesired forces.

## 5.2 CORD AS A WEAVING EMBLEM FOR DEITIES OF FATE AND CONTINUITY OF LIFE

Within the Indo-European mythopoeic conceptual framework, the notion of a cord or a thread has always been associated with tasks related to time-setting and continuity. Those associations transpire from the tactics and actions of commonly known and classic mythical characters, including: the Greek *Moirai*, Roman *Parcae*, Germanic *Norns* and *Urd*, Hittite *Ištuštaja* and *Papaja* or Slovan *Mokoš* [Toporov 1989:79]. Undoubtedly, the traditional role of a weaving woman was reflected in mythical stories about goddesses manipulating threads and yarn either with a view to supporting or terminating life. To begin with, in the well documented Greek tradition, epic poetry and mythology, the spinning threads or unspoiled fabrics are tantamount to the continuity of existence and events. For

example, symbolic threads, yard and cords are the weaving tools of Ariadne, Helen and Penelope [Pentelia 1993].

Quoting another example, the Indo-European magic of knots was part of the powers attributed to a sovereign of the Varuna – Odin type. Under the three-functional theory of G. Dumézil, Varuna personifies a dark master who casts spells and uses his opening and closing powers to enforce verdicts against those who violated the divine order. Therefore, Varuna was viewed as a guardian of ethical integrity embedded in the ritual law and an upholder of moral correctness of human behaviour. Yet, in the case of a Varuna-type hero, the magic of knots symbolised the dominion over all forms of visible world. Therefore, Varuna is primarily a sorcerer, perfect performer who with the use of cords and knots can either stop specific forms or transform them freely. Varuna's magical skills are reflected in his name which contains the Indo-European lexeme *wer-* 'tie, plait'. In that context, a cord becomes an emblem of a consolidating power used in the art of shaping objects [Dumézil 1952].

Furthermore, it is worth noting two parallel phrases arising from the Indo-Iranian tradition: *tantum atatam* [Rigveda X, 56, 6] and *tantur a tayatam* [Avesta X, 2, 17] both of which can be translated as 'let his family line be continued'. This way, the motif of a stretching cord was combined with the concept of life continuity and sustainability. Such an interpretation is supplemented by two related Greek words *tonós* 'power, strength' and the archaic Indian word *tanás* 'offspring'. In addition, the mythical image equating a cord both with the life of a human being and the continuity of their family is confirmed by the following phrases: the archaic Iranian *tan + ayus* 'thread, prolong life' or <pra> *tar + ayus* 'cut (like a thread) life'. The abovementioned examples of forms retaining similar meanings, found in various texts, enable the hypothetical reconstruction of a ritual phrase *ten aywo-* 'thread = prolong life', 'continue from generation to generation' and in a wider context 'ensure the continuity of some existence'. That phrase represents the verbal illustration of magical actions performed in the field of plaiting and weaving crafts and maybe also when making textile decorations.

### 5.3 CORD AS A SIGN UNIFYING THE RITUAL COMMUNITY – CONNOTATIONS WITH NAMES OF VESSELS

Metaphoric phrases linking the tying activity with the strengthening of a human community (compare with *relationship, obligation, bonds of friendship*, etc.) are common in many Indo-European languages. For example, W. Seyers lists the following words originating from the Celtic culture: Irish *coisring* 'gather', 'tie',

‘obligation’; *adragr* ‘tied’; *adsuidi* ‘ties’, ‘legalise’. All those words represent the coalescence of meanings related not only to rituals and law but also to the art of game and elocution which with time were symbolised by chains and knots [Seyers 1990]. That thesis is also supported by A. Bammesberger who identified numerous words within the Indo-European language family indicating that an identical meaning was carried by ‘to tie’ and ‘something that became a traditional norm’, ‘divine law’ [Bammesberger 1989].

Furthermore, in the oldest Anatolian sources the semantics of knots covers the notion of creating a ritual community and actions which are magical-juridical in nature. To see the relation, compare the Hittite *išhai-/išhi-* ‘tie, twist, oblige (in a ritual sense), *išhul-* ‘treaty, agreement’ with the Luvian *hišhiša* ‘magic’ < ‘something tied by magic’ [Kloekhorst 2008:391-392]. Though disputable, the two aforementioned lexemes are also often compared with the Hittite *išhama* ‘song’ and Greek *hymnos* ‘song’ (< ‘something tied’). Yet, it cannot be precluded that the reduplications of *hišhi-* typical of the Luvian language are the Anatolian phenomenon and reflect the archaic practice of repeating actions for their “magical strengthening”. Thus, it may be assumed that *hišhi-* meaning ‘tie – tie’ originates from a formula referring to manipulating a cord by winding it around an object (the Indo-European reconstruction:  $(s)h_2i - sh_2i-$ ). The discussed Indo-European group of morpheme  $sh_2ey-$  ‘tie’ includes also the archaic Nordic *seiðr* ‘cord, magic’ – the magic of knots applied by Odin (Rix 2001:544; for more information about the parallels of mythological gods and heroes using the magic of knots and ties, see Eliade 1998, chapter 3; Collins 2008, chapter 3).

Adding to the above, the semantic complex linking cult-related terms with the name of a woven basket comprises the Hittite *kaluti* ‘circle of people, separated group of gods’ linked with the Greek word *kalathos* ‘basket’ and *klōzīs* ‘rope, cord’ [Puhvel 1977:151].

Another example of a morpheme whose derivatives include social references is the Indo-European *bhendh-* ‘tie, plait’ which can be compared to the German *Bund* ‘union’, ‘association’, *Band* ‘tape’. Additionally, sacral meanings are reflected in the name of a Thracian goddess *Bendis*, while the social – juridical ones in the Greek *pentherós* ‘father-in-law’. In the context of this study, it needs to be noted that the family of the above words encompasses the names of vessels and receptacles, for example the Greek *pitthos* and the Latin *fiskus*. That semantic field covers also the Latin *fides* ‘faith, trust’ and archaic Irish *bés* ‘custom, habit’. Therefore, based on the above deduction the Indo-European name for a receptacle *bhidhskos* would mean something ‘tied tightly’ ‘something established, trusted’.

Cords representing decorative elements on vessels can be viewed as just an example of their many ritual applications [Kowalski 1998]. The strength and power of a cord, plaiting and other textile patterns was probably transferred onto cord-decorated objects. However, in that very case there is no contradiction between the act of conferring power and cohesion onto objects and giving them their aesthetic qualities. It seems that cord ornamentation retained these magical features, while carrying aesthetic values. That assumption is exemplified by a very specific semantic variation of the morpheme *peh<sub>2</sub>k'* - / *pōk'* - meaning not only 'to strengthen' but also 'to beautify' (amongst others with the use of a cord) – compared with the archaic Germanic *fa3ripō* 'ornament, beauty', the Tocharian B *pakri* 'visible, appearing' and the Umbrian *pacer* 'tied', the archaic Indian *pāṣa* 'cord, knot' [Orel 2003:89; Rix 2001:461; Cheung 2007:299; Pokorny 1959:797; Seebold 1970:185-186].

Thus, an ornament in the form of a ribbon or a cord impression could not only be admired but could also be used to create visual symbolic forms. The above lexeme *bhidhskos*, meaning a woven receptacle or a vessel with plaited elements has its numerous equivalents in the semiotic field. For example, the Celtic *bondyo* meaning 'armlet, bracelet' originally meant 'something plaited', the Germanic *bandwō* meant 'sign' and the Latin *offendix* 'knots, cords as a head cover and symbol of sacerdotal function' [Matasović 2009:70]. All the examples listed above indicate that the plaiting motives represented not only an element of clothing and a piece of decoration but were also a symbol of performed social function or social prestige.

However it should be emphasised that the archaeological interpretation of ornamentation found on pottery is based on modern analyses and understanding of the ontological nature of an object. Thus, an ornament is viewed as just one of many features of an object not being tantamount to the object's "being" but rather as a mere addition to the object. The act of ornamenting an adequately shaped vessel is usually, in a sense, understood as a complementary action. Therefore, from the perspective of the vessel's practical qualities, ornamentation is rarely functional in nature. Nonetheless, it seems that the presence of decorative elements is not always a prerequisite for an effective use of a given vessel. That viewpoint, however, may be seen to be incorrect with regard to the prehistoric communities in the case of which each and every element of an object is considered to be absolutely indispensable in the object's structure.

## 6. ORNAMENTATION AS A SYMBOL IDENTIFYING THE USERS OF CORD-DECORATED VESSELS

It is quite obvious that both the type, quantity and quality of vessels and the context behind their occurrence may provide data about the social structure of their users. Vessels can be viewed therefore as material emblems of a group identity and symbols of social hierarchy, etc. Most likely, they were also used strategically to facilitate the establishment of intergroup contacts. In addition, the practice of forming and, in particular, of decorating vessels was either sanctioned by tradition or was based on skills gained by some communities within a family or a tribe [Soudský, Pavlů 1966:106 and forthcoming]. Therefore, any achievements in that domain could be offered, exchanged or be treated as a family-owned storage of preferred skills and competence in the field of craft, art or technical abilities. In that context, the studies of stylistically changeable decorations found on pottery are of great significance for research into the prehistoric Neolithic cultures, while many aspects related to the distinctive function of ornamentation are increasingly often subject to in-depth critical analyses [Szmyt 1996:41-45].

Should the hypothesis where an ornament represents an integral part of an object's structure be accepted, it can be implied that the practice of decorating vessels with cord or textile impressions was inspired by magical-mythical meanings and as a consequence, it may reflect complex processes of accession to the discussed storage of symbols. In other words, the attractiveness of ornamentation was fuelled by the efforts of individual Neolithic communities to participate in a set of goods and concepts signified by the symbolism of cords and plaiting. The above symbolism would stem from a set of concepts reflected in adequate physical manifestations, which at a later stage of the symbiosis process were transformed into purely metaphoric meanings as per the matrix suggested below:

- physical manifestation: *cord*;
- implied meaning; *strength, stability, protection – apotropaic power, continuity of existence*;
- aesthetic qualities: *admired signs/symbols viewed as decorative elements*;
- identifying objects: *objects/vessels, people as communities, family – ritual – juridical (ties.)*

In the practical dimension, however, the above developments occurred as part of partially limited codes, i.e. individual producers and users of cord-decorated vessels did not have to be aware of the complexity behind the semiotic links and contexts analysed here. Against that background, the sheer sense of a pattern underlying the use of specific symbols sanctioned ritually and socially, seemed to suffice [Douglas 2004:64-67]. It is difficult though, to assess to what extent the discussed ornamentation type evidences the formation in the Neolithic of an 'independent symbolic storage' [*external symbolic storage* according to Donald

1991]. Undoubtedly, cord ornaments are neither a pure outcome of traditional methods applied to make organic receptacles nor a consequence of spontaneous imitation. In contrast to other potential signs and symbols of social identity (for example, the T – shaped amulet of the GAC, bell beaker, early-Bronze dagger, etc.), the cord motif inspired an extensive and well marked cultural valorisation process, which was also significant in terms of mythological thinking (for example, the symbolism of fate). Therefore, it seems that another stage (compared to earlier traditions, including the linear ones of the Anatolian – Balkan circle) of strengthening the storage of concepts sanctioning cord-related symbolism can be presumed. In the long-lived symbolic genealogy that process is likely to date back to the Paleolithic plaiting crafts. Nevertheless, the Neolithic axiology behind textile techniques enabled the spreading of mythological aura onto other fields of production, including pottery. As a consequence, it was yarn, thread and cords that were attributed by the ancient mythical – ritual tradition the unique metaphoric power to bind communities and that also reflected both the continuity and fragility of human existence [West 2007:372-374].

*Translated by Wisława Głowacka*

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AP URSS – Arkheologiczni pamiatky Ukrainskoyi Radianskoyi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki. Kiev.
- BPS – Baltic-Pontic Studies. Poznań.
- KSIA – Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii. Moskva.
- KSIA AN USSR – Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii Akademiyi Nauk Ukrainskoy Sovetskoy Sotsialisticheskoy Respubliki. Kiev.
- MIA – Materialy i Issledovaniya po Arkheologii USSR. Moskva. Leningrad.
- SA – Sovetskaya Arkheologiya. Moskva.

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